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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 005736

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NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KDEM KPAO TH BM

SUBJECT: CONFIDANT DESCRIBES STEPS FORWARD FOR BURMA

REF: RANGOON 1084

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Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Leon de Riedmatten, former liaison between Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and the Burmese junta, recently discussed with UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari proposals to increase the effectiveness of Gambari's November mission to Burma. De Riedmatten told us that Gambari was more resolved to achieve results on his current trip and that Gambari returned to Burma convinced not to allow the generals to proceed with business as usual. He added that the UN planned to seek out 'events' that provoked reaction from the generals, thereby granting the UN leverage to push Gambari's agenda. UNDP coordinator Charles Petrie's remarks last week regarding Burma's economic situation, which resulted in the junta's requesting his departure, were part of a calculated move by the UN, stated de Riedmatten. He added that an ASEAN-led regional approach should support Gambari's efforts, and identified Vietnam and Indonesia as central to any regional accord on Burma. De Riedmatten's account may provide useful insights into Gambari's current views, although we note that, like so many others, de Riedmatten is unsure how best to advance our shared interest in improving the situation in Burma. END SUMMARY.

GUIDANCE FOR GAMBARI

¶12. (C) During a November 6 meeting, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue Director Leon de Riedmatten told us he met with Gambari twice in Singapore during the week of October 29 - November 2. He described Gambari as much more determined to return to Burma to convince the junta that it was time for the regime to act. Gambari confided to de Riedmatten that the UN was deliberately seeking to provoke the junta in order to galvanize the UN's efforts to move forward Gambari's agenda. We asked de Riedmatten to clarify what types of events the UN had in mind. He immediately referenced Petrie's remarks on UN Day regarding the poor socio-economic conditions in Burma. According to de Riedmatten, the UN expected that Petrie's remarks would cause the junta to lash out against the UN. This response would provide Gambari an opportunity to press the regime to take steps forward in other areas.

¶13. (C) During their meeting, de Riedmatten suggested Gambari encourage ASSK to release some kind of public statement expressing her views on the current situation in Burma. She had not made any public statements for several years, de Riedmatten reasoned, and so if she released one now, she would command great attention, including from the junta. The statement could endorse recent proposals by members of the international community to offer economic incentives to the regime, de Riedmatten suggested. Such an announcement would serve as an example of ASSK's willingness to consider new ideas. Or, ASSK could release the letter she sent to Than Shwe in 2004, in which she offered to begin discussions with the regime. de Riedmatten explained that, previously, ASSK had not wanted to release publicly her letter to State Peace

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and Development Council Chairman Than Shwe, but doing so at this juncture would demonstrate to the Burmese, the region, and the international community that she had been open to dialogue with the junta all along. This could be the next event, de Riedmatten suggested, as the junta would have to respond to any kind of public statement from ASSK. Gambari reportedly reacted very favorably to this suggestion, and planned to present it to ASSK the next time they met in Rangoon.

¶14. (C) de Riedmatten also advised Gambari to ask ASSK to remove herself from the politics of the crisis in Burma by stepping down as General Secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD). She could be much more effective as a moral authority for the democracy movement in Burma, he surmised.

NEW SOLUTIONS NEEDED

¶15. (C) Regardless of which tactic the UN pursued, de Riedmatten believed that Burma deserved new initiatives and original ideas to address the most recent crisis in Burma. He felt that the current crackdown showed the international community could not simply rely on constructive engagement with Burma, but blunt sanctions alone also were unlikely to prompt positive change. It was time to offer something that had not been attempted before. His suggestions ran the gamut from ASEAN organized conferences with luminaries on Burma, to a combination of economic pressures and incentives. He also felt that continued discussion of Burma at the UN Security Council (UNSC), without going so far as to introduce a resolution, would significantly preoccupy Than Shwe. The junta leader believed he did an excellent job running his country, de Riedmatten explained, and it would worry him that his efforts were being discussed at the highest levels of the highest international institution.

¶16. (C) De Riedmatten strongly supported ASEAN taking the lead on efforts to promote democratic reform in Burma. ASEAN's

actions could complement those of the UN and support Gambari's efforts by providing regional legitimacy to the process. When asked why he thought that regional action would succeed now where it had failed in the past, de Riedmatten replied that the dynamics had changed. ASEAN and other countries in the region felt pressure from the international community to take a stronger position in responding to the recent crackdown in Burma.

¶17. (C) Within ASEAN, de Riedmatten identified Indonesia and Vietnam as valuable partners to motivate ASEAN. He focused on Indonesia because of its role as president of the UNSC during the month of November. Even though Indonesia may have publicly shied away from using that position to influence the situation in Burma, the Indonesians would have to respond to Gambari's briefing to the UNSC following his visit to Burma. Vietnam was key because of its own experiences opening up its political and economic systems, but also because it was in the interest of the Vietnamese government to have a strong Burma able to compete with China.

¶18. (C) Sanctions were an effective tool to pressure the junta, de Riedmatten stated. He informed us that, according to sources he deemed credible, the generals and their business associates were searching for new countries to stash

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their savings and assets. Apparently they were working with a number of financial experts to devise ways to avoid current and any possible new sanctions, including using private Swiss banks.

COMMENT

¶19. (C) Leon de Riedmatten has a long history with Burma, having spent time as the head of the International Committee for the Red Cross in Burma and as former UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail's local liaison to both the Burmese regime and the democratic opposition, including ASSK. This background has also won him the confidence of Gambari. In the past we have found de Riedmatten's insights interesting and often valuable. We do not know if Petrie's statement was truly intended as a deliberate provocation to support Gambari's efforts; as we understand, it was developed by the entire UN Country Team in Rangoon and released without clearance from New York. Burma-based UN officials told Embassy Rangoon their aim with the statement was to send a strong message to the regime that it was not going to be business as usual with the UN. On November 6, Petrie told Embassy Rangoon that Gambari was using the regime's reaction to the letter (Petrie's expulsion) to lobby the regime to allow the UN to establish a separate office in Rangoon to handle political matters. This was an idea Gambari had shopped around during his November 2006 visit and that had strong support from the pro-democracy opposition. While we have not heard of plans for ASSK to issue a public statement, Embassy Rangoon confirmed that Gambari has been lobbying hard to have her restrictions lifted. End Comment.

¶10. (C) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Rangoon.
BOYCE